

Preparing the Ground for GROWTH & RENEWAL



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The INQUIRER

Issue 7697 May 3 2008

65p

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

Subscribe by writing to Inquirer Subscriptions, Essex Hall 1-6 Essex Street London WC2R 3HY

Annual subscriptions are £24.

Cheques payable to The Inquirer.

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £70 plus VAT. Deadlines are available from the editor.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

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Inquiring Words

Jesus told us:

"The first commandment is: 'The Lord our God is one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You must love your neighbour as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these."

These are the words of our faith.

Blessed are you, eternal God, to be praised and glorified forever.

We pray for the church of Christ, and for all people of faith in east or west or north or south: **God of many names, grant that all people of faith may truly and humbly serve you.**

We pray for the earth, our planet home: **Creator of all, lead us and every people into ways of justice and peace. That we may respect one another in freedom and truth, awaken in us a sense of wonder for the earth and all that is in it. Teach us to care creatively for its resources.**

We pray for the community: **God of truth, inspire with your wisdom those whose decisions affect the lives of others, that all may act with integrity and courage. Give grace to all whose lives are linked with ours. May we serve Christ in one another, and love as God loves us.**

We pray for those in need: **God of hope, comfort and restore all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. May they know the power of your healing love. Make us willing agents of your compassion. Strengthen us as we share in making people whole.**

We remember those who have died and those who mourn: **We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in the faith of Christ and those whose faith is known to you alone. Into your hands we commend them. We praise you for all who have entered eternal rest. May their example inspire and encourage us.**

We pray for ourselves and our ministries: **God of joy, you have called us to serve you. Grant that we may walk in your presence; your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills: until, at the end of our journey, we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace, in Christ's spirit.**

Amen.

— From a communion service conducted by the Rev Jeffrey Lane Gould at the GA Meetings

First steps in growth agenda

By Neville Kenyon

We British Unitarians have never been good at growth. Despite energetic “missionary” work in the 19th century by visionary ministers, the anticipated growth was never sustained. Today our campaigning zeal is stifled by our wish to appear respectable – proselytising and marketing have traditionally been seen as inappropriate for Unitarians.

There are, of course, more inhibitions to growth than a mere reluctance to engage with strangers. Some of these we can do little about in the short term.

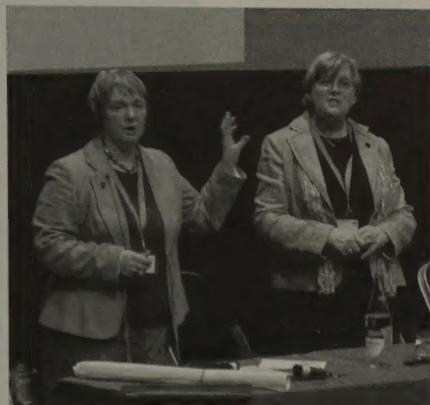
We are geographically uneven. Whole swathes of the country are without a Unitarian presence. When our members move to another area they need to be pretty resilient to travel the miles it might be to their nearest Unitarian congregation. Many decide not to bother – so there is an inherent leakage of membership caused by our geographical spread. There is also a general decline in attendance at all conventional church services. And because we started from a low numerical base, maybe we are feeling the pinch more than others. Another relevant difficulty for us is that our “market” is very narrow. Only a small minority of the general public will be attracted to our liberal religious position. One only has to glance at the tabloid press to realise that our values are not universally in demand. This observation is not intended to indicate that we are elitist – far from it – but we should face the fact that our “brand” will never have mass appeal.

However, there are still many folk seeking a spiritual home and there is a continuing influx of like-minded people joining our movement. We have some very thriving, burgeoning groups but we know of others that are barely sustainable with low numbers and high-maintenance buildings.

There are many positive growth and renewal initiatives that can be embarked on by even our smallest groups. There is so much within our direct control. For example, some of our notice boards are dreadful! Grants are available from Essex Hall to upgrade signage in line with the Consistent Identity and many groups are already taking advantage of this offer. Additionally, with fresh eyes, our buildings can be seen as uninviting through lack of care and kerb appeal. This applies to any garden areas that are allowed to become overgrown. Financial assistance to improve the general attractiveness may be available through the local District or Essex Hall.

Great success is being achieved through our many web pages. Much attention is being applied to these by Unitarian web wizards both locally and nationally. For the first time ever, Unitarians can take advantage of very inexpensive publicity and information distribution throughout the world! What an opportunity. For several years now, the internet has been the source of the majority of our new members. But it is important that what they perceive when they visit one of our congregations conforms to the image projected by the web site.

The Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly is so committed to the growth and renewal of our movement that it organised a whole day at this spring's Annual Meetings for discussion on the theme.



Dot Hewerdine and Dawn Buckle facilitated 'Growth Day'. Photo by John Hewerdine

This was a most exciting day! It was not intended to produce all the answers but was intended rather as an initial exercise in addressing the issues involved. More than 300 Unitarians gathered for an initial address by Sir Peter Soulsby MP, Convenor of the Executive Committee. This was followed by eight Unitarians expressing their individually very different views on what growth within our community meant to them. Hopefully these contributions will be featured more widely within the Unitarian press.

The assembled company was then split into 11 separate groups, each led by a facilitator and a scribe to discuss differing

themes and specific questions. The full assembly then reconvened to receive reports from the discussion groups. There were 10 core subjects identified as interpretations of different aspects of growth – Numerical, Spiritual, Resources, Hospitality, Publicity, Buildings, Events, Outreach, New Starts and “Knowing who we are”.

There were further break-out groups to discuss these topics and then the whole conference re-assembled to be led by energetic Executive members Dot Hewerdine and Dawn Buckle in the reporting back session.

The full feedback results have not yet been finalised but the ideas emanating included appointing a “champion” in each congregation responsible for growth, full website development, experimentation with worship spaces and styles, learning how to welcome visitors cordially but without harassment, serving the local community (faith in action) and initiating new starts in areas where there was no current Unitarian presence.

Everyone was issued with feedback forms from this marathon session and over 200 have been returned. It will take time to analyse all the results and Dot Hewerdine has agreed to undertake this painstaking task.

As a starting point, this venture was most rewarding. In its way it was typically British! It may have been short of some of the professionalism and razzmatazz that one associates with our North American cousins who form the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) – they are past masters at this kind of initiative – but it was the first time such a venture had been embarked upon by the UK General Assembly and the vast majority of delegates were enthralled!

This is by no means the end of the story. The “Growth Issue” is firmly with us and the enthusiasm engendered by that special day in Hatfield will have continuing ramifications. Individual congregations and Districts will now have better ideas for attracting more interested inquirers and the Executive Committee has undertaken to keep the issue high on its agenda. There is an air of optimism within our movement which augurs well for the future of our liberal religious tradition.

The Growth Day made a great contribution to members' self-confidence and engendered a determination to ensure that a sound UK Unitarian base will be bequeathed to future generations.

Neville Kenyon is a member of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.

Growth Day: A different view

By Louise Rogers

When sitting at the growth sessions at the annual meetings listening to the metaphors about growth, I was reminded of a trip to the Australian desert around Uluru and Kata Tjuta. Many of the trees had been around for 200-300 years. Because of the inhospitable conditions, they grew very little every year but doggedly hung in there; which perhaps was not what the Executive Committee had in mind, when members planned 'Growth Day'.

During the morning session we were asked us to discuss growth and renewal in groups allocated randomly. We then fed back three ideas. Afterwards we had lunch. The afternoon sessions were based on the issues emerging from all the morning groups – we each decided which issue to focus on and so new groups were formed around each issue.

The resulting discussions focused on developing an action plan – which was produced at the end of the growth event. It all went off very smoothly and the facilitators did a very good job, at least in the groups that I attended, where there was plenty of discussion and respect for differing views and a feeling of being in this together.

So what was wrong with all of this? The first point has to be the idea that asking people who have been unable to grow their congregations, "What needs to be done to grow congregations?" is probably an ineffective way to plan for growth.

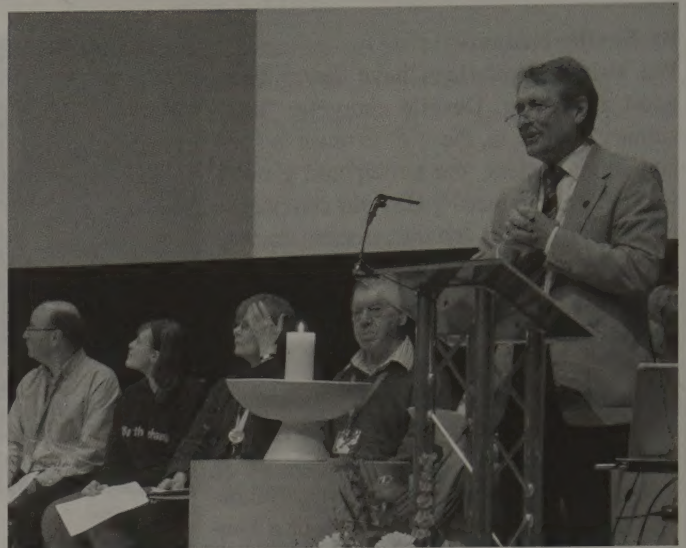
Putting people into random groups removes the possibility of identifying the differences inherent in our community e.g. between those congregations with a full-time minister or a part-time minister or no minister. These differences get lost in randomisation but they are extremely important to understand.

The discussion about growth and renewal seemed superfluous, surely we, or at the very least the EC, should know loads about this. What did not emerge from any groups was the importance of leadership which might have been due to the focus of the discussions; another question may have produced this issue. At any rate it should have been slipped into the mix when the afternoon sessions were being organised.

The linear approach taken in the afternoon sessions where each group had one issue is perhaps the least successful way of producing creative and effective solutions. A matrix approach where people are encouraged to think of actions that address a number of issues is much better and not difficult to administer.

The action plan produced at the end was fairly predictable, I would suggest because of the process followed. It contained most of what our commissions, panels, districts and congregations are already doing or have in their sights to do. One suggested action was that every congregation should appoint a growth tsar. But what do people consider the roles of their committees and ministerial leadership to be? Striving for growth is not an add-on rather it should be inherent in all that we do.

Two broader questions; the first concerns the expertise that we have within our community. We have congregations that are growing – why not ask them what works? We have commissions and panels – why not ask them what they are planning to do? We have associated bodies for example, the Nightingale Centre, the London Spirituality Network and the Hibbert Trust



Executive Committee Convenor Peter Soulsby opened Growth Day. Photo by John Hewerdine

initiative – what can we learn from them?

Peter Soulsby assured us on several occasions that the EC is listening – but who to? If there are people who are making a difference why was the EC not listening to them and asking them to take a leading role in the day?

My second question is, shouldn't this about transformation rather than growth – do we really want more of the same? We are looking at more advertising and more web presence but when someone walks through the door of a congregation that is stagnant, what will they find – will it be uplifting and inspiring? Will they walk through a Unitarian door again? We need to take what we have and transform what we produce. This requires a change of thinking and effective leadership.

So what were the alternatives to the day that we were presented with? Here's one – first ask those people who are already growing to tell the rest of us how they are doing that. Create groups from people with shared experience, which would allow shared issues to emerge. There should have been a group of people discussing national rather than congregational issues. Growth does not just happen at local level. And the question to be discussed? "What stops your congregation/group from growing and transforming?"

The afternoon sessions could have been people meeting in groups with shared resources and/or other connections, perhaps district groups, and asked to come up with action plans for themselves and action points for other parts of the organisation. These actions would address how to overcome the barriers. The action plans would be about transformation and change. And we need to be action focused – if everyone had gone away with their own action plan then perhaps the transformations would be starting right now.

What metaphors should we use – an Australian desert or an English country garden? I want neither. I want the summertime tropics where the transformative rain brings amazing growth in a very short time.

Louise Rogers is a member of Newcastle-under-Lyme Meeting House.

Growth Day: Some practical tips

By Kate Taylor

These notes have been prompted by the recent work of the Communications Commission and by the Publicity Workshop that formed part of the Growth Day at the General Assembly's annual meetings at Hatfield in March

How well is your chapel known in your area? There is much that can (indeed should!) be done to publicise it, and what we stand for, if you wish to see growth.

1. We know that some newcomers arrive because they have seen a chapel's website. So having a good website should be given high priority. If necessary, advice and help can be obtained from the volunteers to be found at www.ukunitarians.org.uk

2. Make sure that your external notice-board is well maintained and attractive. Again, if necessary, apply for a grant from the Communications Commission. In the first instance, contact Peter Teets at the General Assembly's headquarters, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY, e-mail pteets@unitarian.org.uk

3. Display the GA's Wayside Pulpit posters on your external board. (No less a person than Sir Peter Soulsby was drawn to us first by reading a Wayside Pulpit.)

4. Create good-looking and meaty Newsletters, with original material, and send a copy regularly to your local library and elsewhere if you can find other receptive outlets.

5. Publicise our special approach to rites of passage, for example by sending copies of the new leaflet 'Funeral and Memo-

rial Services the Unitarian Way' to local undertakers.

6. Follow the lead given by the Macclesfield congregation: have quality material, designed specially for your chapel, ready to put out for visitors who attend namings, weddings, blessings, or funerals.

7. Persuade every member of your congregation to wear a chalice badge and every car driver to have a Unitarian sticker in the window.

8. Use the media. If possible, appoint your own press officer and encourage her or him to attend the annual conferences of UCCN (Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators' Network). Send frequent media releases to your local papers and radio stations, for example giving advance notice of, or reporting, events, or focusing on key points from provocative sermons. (I am always willing to provide advice on draft releases if you feel insecure. I can be contacted at kate@airtime.co.uk)

9. Write letters to your local and regional papers – or persuade your chapel secretary or chair to do so – when there is an opportunity to provide a Unitarian angle on a news story or feature.

10. Take part in the national Heritage Weekend organised by the Civic Trust, which (outside London) takes place between 11 and 14 September this year. Your opening times will be publicised by the Trust. Contact hods@civictrust.org.uk or write to the Civic Trust whose address, as it happens, is Essex Hall, Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY.

Kate Taylor is a member at Wakefield.

GA session: How warm is our welcome?

By Joy Croft

"All are welcome here," declares one of our most popular hymns. Not only our church doors, it says, but our hearts too are wide open to everyone. But how welcoming are we Unitarians really? In conjunction with Denominational Support, the new Faith and Public Issues Commission hosted a session at the annual meetings, asking that uncomfortable question and asking us to offer *radical* hospitality

Dorothy Hewerdine opened by listing people who had spoken to members of the Executive at last year's GA, describing instances of exclusion from some of our churches. Particularly painful were experiences of one or two gay attenders. Sad to say, there seem all too many ways to say, "You're not welcome", some pretty brusque, others so subtle that you almost wouldn't notice – unless you were the target. Then we sang the hymn.

Although Dot's list was quite comprehensive, disappointingly people with disabilities were missing from it. I know this concern had been raised because I took it to the Executive myself. Here is a reminder of how hard it can be really to hear the uncomfortable messages. Yet we must, or there's no hope of meeting the needs and widening the welcome.

Film clips followed the introduction: advertisements made for American television by the United Church of Christ. They showed how seductively easy it can be to exclude not only same sex couples and people with disabilities but single parents and single people from family-centred communities, older people from youthful communities, people from other ethnic

groups than our own and people with smaller economic resources than the average of our group.

These graphic images launched a lively and heartfelt discussion. Participants were warmly willing to share with their groups some bad and also some very good experiences of Unitarian hospitality. We began to realise it's not only newcomers who need our unqualified welcome. Committed attenders and even members of a close-knit congregation may continue to feel like outsiders to a core group. We need to be watchful for this, to widen the welcome and celebrate the diversity.

The session seemed to have grasped participants' imaginations. It ended with offers to help with the Radical Hospitality project. the Rev Jeff Gould, convenor of the FPI Commission would welcome your participation (reach him at Bury Unitarian church or on jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com). In fact, of course, *all* Unitarians need to get involved.

Hospitality matters because of our Unitarian principles. We say *every* person is of infinite value, and that includes old and young, rich and poor, gay and straight, etc., etc., etc. Hospitality matters because the next person through the door – with or without a family, with or without a disability, from our own ethnic group or another – might become the treasurer or organist or lay leader our church needs. Hospitality matters most of all because our free religious communities thrive on diversity and breadth of vision. Only by widening our welcome can we continue to grow in spirit. Only when our congregations are fully welcoming, are they fully alive.

The Rev Joy Croft is a retired Unitarian minister.

Growth: Can Omega answer Alpha?

By Janet Briggs

At the GA in Hatfield we had the opportunity to see the pilot DVD of the 'Course for Practical Spirituality' commissioned by the Hibbert Trust. This originally Anti-Trinitarian Trust was founded in 1847 for the promotion of Liberal Christianity. Its byline is "promoting public interest and personal scholarship in contemporary issues in liberal religion". The course is intended for Unitarians and for a worldwide English-speaking liberal religious and secular audience. It will be designed as an alternative to the Christian Evangelical Alpha Course, which is a widely distributed franchise. Churches or District Associations will be able to purchase the set of six DVDs and show them over a period in a setting like an Engagement Group, with an opening exchange, a meal, a viewing followed by discussion and a closing ceremony. Likely themes for the six sessions are:

- What is Spirituality?
- How do I know what to believe?
- How do I live in right relationship?
- Where can I find meaning?
- How can I make sense of sin and suffering?
- How can I make peace with death?
- It is intended that a charge should be levied for attendance at the course.

The Rev David Usher is the project leader, and he has assembled a production team consisting of Christine Hayhurst, manager; Jane Blackall, webmaster; Chrissie Wilkie, training and Wayne Brittenden, filmmaker. It is anticipated that the course will take about three years to complete. Their goals are to create an excellent, professional product, to reach a wide

audience and to cover costs.

The first DVD was completed recently. After a few unannounced shots of, presumably, church architecture, we launched into a persuasive monologue on spirituality given by David Usher. He was wearing a dark jacket and black jersey, in front of black drapes. Why this artificial, studio presentation, when natural light and an everyday background would have been so much more appealing? David is pleasantly photogenic, and his voice is good, with an easy accent honed in many lands. From time to time the camera moved to show us a studio filled with mainly youngish white middle-class adults. Were they the target audience? We saw them smile from time to time, but disappointingly, there was no footage of audience participation. In fact, David told us that it had been edited out. He had some conversation with Ruth Gledhill, religion journalist for The Times and with the Rev Adrian Smith, who is a former missionary in Africa, now writer and lecturer, a delightfully liberal man. The text of the DVD is interesting, but there was no time for a break for us to pursue a thought or discuss an idea, still less, take a note. The usual time constraints of GA meetings meant that there was little time for discussion afterwards. Presumably, printed copy will be provided with the DVDs, to facilitate group discussion.

A visual medium demands variety; location shots or photographs, perhaps pictures of relevant works of art. Our Unitarian assembly was happy to listen enthralled to this new venture. I know that there is, in the wider community, an appetite for spirituality without the restrictions of creeds. Will this hold the attention of a less captive audience? We can only hope so.

Janet Briggs is a member of the Glasgow congregation

Publicity project pays off in Macclesfield

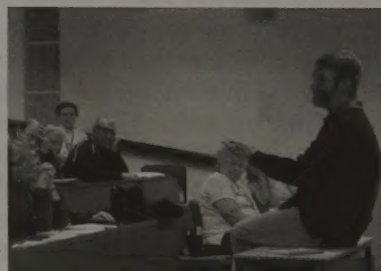
By Martin A Gienke

In the Communication Commission (Comm Comm) slot, the Rev Michael Dadson presented the Macclesfield project, a congregation-led publicity project. He offered to show the meeting examples of publicity materials but wasn't about to let them be taken away as he stressed the need for each congregation to come up with their own words and publicity materials. This was Macclesfield's publicity developed over the past two years and along the way the congregation had evolved their own vision, purpose and identity. Their particular circumstances and context led them to two possible foci, rites of passage and events. The rites of passage services were already a strong 'product', an opportunity to demonstrate the Unitarian ethos, but they needed more exposure. The events, such as concerts, were attended by a loyal group of supporters who usually were repeat attenders, and it was felt they shouldn't be bombarded by Unitarian publicity as they already knew the chapel.

Macclesfield members used a Communications Commission questionnaire, which asked the right questions about purpose, resources, time scale and assessment. A publicity group of six were energised by discovering what their own identity was. The underlying question to their deliberations was 'what are we?' Answers to this provided a secure base from which to fund and launch the campaign.

They developed their own design and used it throughout their materials to create an identity – a precursor to the GA's

Consistent Identity. Bookmarks were produced along with small leaflets (about 4 inches square) about rites of passage. These items were attractive and economical with verbiage, obviously with much thought invested in them. Michael came back



The Rev Michael Dadson

to his central theme that Macclesfield did this their way, but suggested other congregations could find the process is rewarding as a bonding and unifying exercise for the congregation. They would need to find their own way.

Other news from Comm Comm and the Publications Panel is that The Unitarian Life edited by Steven Lingwood has been published and all 50 copies were sold out by the time of the General Assembly Meetings. However, the panel operates a flexible system whereby they can print additional copies as ordered, so they're not out of print, just awaiting orders.

The next congregation to embark on a publicity project is Upper Chapel Sheffield employing the General assembly's Consistent Identity. So we watch this space next year for another promising report back.

Martin A Gienke is the lay leader at the Bury St Edmunds congregation.

GA president reflects on her year

This is an excerpt of Celia Midgley's outgoing presidential address to the General Assembly meetings at Hatfield.

It seems like only yesterday that I was standing here – right here – at the start of my year of office. I spoke then, and throughout my year I have spoken about congregations, the importance of congregations. I hasten to add that I have delivered more than one sermon in our 16 districts and the many congregations that I have visited, but the centrality of our congregations and the need to build, strengthen and support them has been a constant thread running through the year. I am pleased to have seen the same urgency coming from our Executive Committee. And, in our focusing on growth this week, we have acknowledged that it is the local group that is the seedbed for our growing. Village chapel, city church or chapel, meeting house in a market town – these are the places where community is built.

It is not lightly that I mention buildings, those places, sanctuaries where we meet. We describe ourselves as a movement but that doesn't mean restless wandering. Three hundred and more years ago our movement would never have begun without those early meeting houses where the free and unfettered voice of reason could be heard. Decades later, Theophilus Lindsey knew the importance of a name on a place of meeting for worship. In the early 19th century, we might have lost our buildings – chapels, schools, the lot – we came so close, and it is hard to imagine that we would have survived that. To come right up to date, what a brave new wonder is the solar-powered Stockton church, and let us give a cheer for bright new (subsidised!) notice-boards that clearly proclaim – 'We are in business' and 'We welcome you, whoever you are!' Let us cherish our buildings. And let us make them work for us. Be they old or new, let us use them respectfully and creatively. And let us be inspired by them, by the love and dedication woven into their fabric, by pews that have supported generations of worshippers, by windows that shine with faith and hope, and with words such as those in the chapel of Manchester College, Oxford, on the Burne-Jones, Morris and Co. windows, 'Elargissez Dieu'. Wonderful, breath-filled words, 'Elargissez Dieu' – make God bigger! Open yourself to a wider concept of God. Has that been a hard exercise for our Gellionnen folk, after their lovely old Welsh chapel was brutally trashed? I saw grief, but determination and faith rather than bitterness there.

In my visiting of our districts and congregations in this island and in Northern Ireland too, I have been thrilled by many places of worship from five centuries. Yet it is more than art



The Revs Celia and John Midgley when they travelled back to Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead, where Celia was once a member.

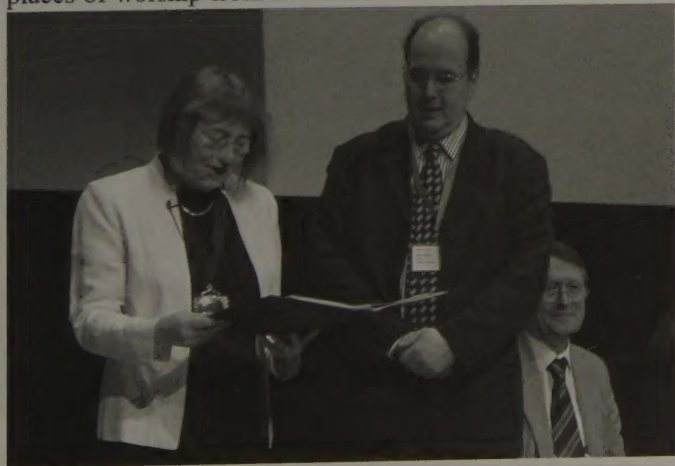
and architecture that has moved me; it is the sense of continuing commitment to our liberal religious witness. To be handed a cup of tea after a service, be it in the broad and impressive Manchester College Oxford or the tiny converted shop where our devoted Mossley folk worship in East Cheshire, or at splendidly laid out afternoon tea tables in the schoolroom of the chapel at Pantydefaid in Ceredigion, is to receive and to share in a familiar ritual of hospitality that for me has this year linked all our congregations into one caring and committed body.

If there is a curious paradox here, in saying on the one hand that God cannot be confined (*Elargissez Dieu* – Diderot), yet that we need to create communities where we can meet God, then so be it. But let our communities, of whatever size, be large in spirit; and let them be rooted, know where they come from, historically, theologically, yet be welcoming of all and adventurous in religion.

I have been on an adventure this past year and it has been richly rewarding. To all who have given me hospitality I offer thanks. To my congregations of Altrincham and Urmston I offer thanks; they have had extra work to do this year. I thank all who have conducted worship for my two congregations when I have been away on Presidential duties. The staff, officers, executive committee and colleagues of this Assembly have been helpful too. And of course I thank my husband John who has been both helpful and wise in what for him too has been a very important year. Lastly, a big thank you to all of you, the Assembly, for your confidence in me and for this enormous privilege of being your president.

Last Sunday, in my home congregations, we sang the line, 'Pilgrims on this gladsome earth, *Alleluia!*' And we are pilgrims. And there's another paradox. We put down roots; we are also pilgrims on a quest for meaning. There is a sense in which we are, each of us, alone in this quest, on this journey. But we can be of enormous help to one another on our pilgrimages. We can and we do provide oases, spiritual oases where we can learn together and be of comfort, support and inspiration to one another. May we do that this coming year and in all the years ahead.

The Rev Celia Midgley was General Assembly president 2007-08.



The Revs Celia Midgley and Steve Dick opened the GA.
Photo by John Hewerdine

UHS hears of Unitarian politicians

By Alan Ruston

The Unitarian Historical Society is known for the speed at which its AGM is completed during its slot at the GA. This year was no exception, so that there was adequate time to hear the address given by Professor David Bebbington of the University of Stirling on 'Unitarian Members of Parliament in the Nineteenth Century.'

As with so many things Unitarian, there is always the problem of definition. Were particular individuals aligned to us, or really just vaguely associated? Many were born Unitarians but slipped away into the Church of England for various reasons in later life. Some apparently had dual membership.

After detailed research, David concluded that he could identify 97 Unitarian MPs, which is remarkable compared with the 102 he found amongst Congregationalists who had roughly 20-times our membership. They were chiefly Whigs in the early period and Liberals (no less than 73) later. There were so few Tories that the *Christian Life* concluded that a Unitarian Conservative MP 'was as rare as it was queer'.

Many were connected by family and had strong local connections. For example sixteen were High Sheriffs of their county. Some congregations seemed to attract or help create MPs - for example Great Meeting Leicester (Peter Soulsby continues in this tradition) and High Pavement Nottingham. But the leader in this area is Essex Church which, in the century, had nine MPs within its membership, with three others who attended when in London.

There were causes which they espoused, such as Parliamentary reform and support for the secret ballot. Being mainly Liberals they were supporters of free trade and civil liberties, and of course opposed slavery. Education was one of the big divisive issues of the 19th century (has anything changed?) on which Unitarian MPs spoke out regularly. A subject which

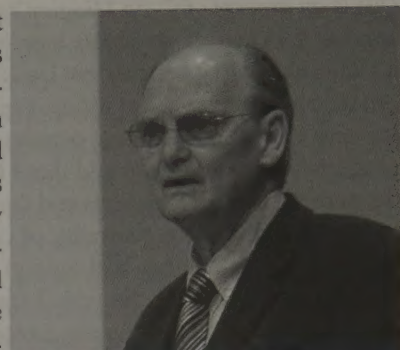
concerned them that seems remote to us was Sunday opening of museums, parks etc, though I don't think many would have wanted it as it is now. In the main they were supporters of international peace, and late in the century there were several fierce opponents of the Boer War, notwithstanding that the most well-known Unitarian MP and Cabinet Minister of the day was Joseph Chamberlain who had done much to bring the war about.

Many took their denominational attachments seriously; no less than seventeen being presidents of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association and others were vice presidents. The institution which several supported was Manchester College. But it was to their local chapel that they had their main allegiance.

Overall, they took a low profile in the House of Commons, and few became ministers in the government. This is different from the 20th century when there were fewer Unitarian MPs but more of them held office. Interestingly, David revealed another aspect about them - their interest in science and the fact that no less than 10 became Fellows of the Royal Society.

Our speaker concluded that the MPs were a good advert for Unitarianism and helped to foster its public image. The full text of Professor Bebbington's research will appear in the *Transactions of the Society* next year.

Alan Ruston is Editor of 'Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society'



Professor David Bebbington

Hatfield reflections from an old f**t

By David Arthur

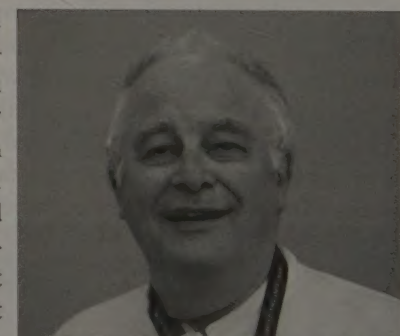
When you have been going to the Annual Meetings for as long as I have (over 40 years now, although I cannot claim a 100% attendance record), you know what to expect, don't you? I have always said that the mere fact of being there, in the company of hundreds of fellow Unitarians, is a spiritually uplifting experience for me, and in that respect this year's meetings in Hatfield lived up to my expectations. The warm feelings start as soon as you arrive; spotting a familiar face while waiting in the queue for the registration desk, or even earlier when you are parking your car.

You also know what to expect when you go back to a familiar place. Once upon a time the Annual Meetings were held in a different location every year, but more recently we have been revisiting places. And this year we came back to Hatfield where we had been in 2007. Whether this was because we had liked the place so much, or because the Annual Meetings Panel had failed to find anywhere else, is immaterial.

To be sure, the de Havilland campus is well suited for our needs. The place is compact, with no more than 300 yards' walk from anywhere to anywhere else (though even 300 yards is a long way when it is pouring with rain!); the meeting rooms are the right size, if rather inflexible; the bedrooms well equipped;

and the bar stocked real ale (but so expensive - it's prices like that which make me realise how sensible I am to live in the North of England!). Some people complained about the bedrooms being cold, though I hadn't noticed; but they must have been right, for on the last evening I found on my bed a (personalised) letter apologising for the lack of heating, and a box of chocolates!

What I really appreciated about the university staff was, however, the way they dealt promptly with putting things right. On the first evening, returning to our hall of residence at about midnight, the door to the hall would not open with our keycards (I confess, I do not like keycards - give me a proper key any day!). Two security men came, and failed; another came, and failed; they were about to call an engineer when



David Arthur

(Continued on page 11)

No survival without the women!

John Relly Beard Lecture 2008

By John Midgley

Women in the Unitarian movement formed a major theme at this year's GA Annual Meetings, so the choice of Ann Peart and her John Relly Beard Lecture topic were highly appropriate. Ann has researched and written extensively in this field. She is clearly on home territory. *Beyond the Bounded Sphere – Women's Contribution to the Unitarian Ministry in Britain*, held the attention of a large audience throughout a presentation filled with challenging thoughts such as, 'Our movement would not have survived if it had not been for the women in it.' There were lively illustrations, such as John Relly Beard's wife Mary. She bore 10 children, three of whom died; she ran the home, often with very little money; supported her husband, taught, undertook pastoral care, undertook service in the community among the poor and gave hospitality to students for the ministry. No wonder she was called his unpaid curate.

Continuing the historical perspective, Ann spoke of the 19th century Manchester Domestic Missioner who found a woman in rags who had just given birth in a slum cellar. He immediately sent for his wife to come to help her. Ann's vivid illustrations came rolling in, highlighting the work of many a heroic woman, either as a minister with a small 'm' or as a minister's wife. The renowned Anna Laetitia Barbauld was described as a female divine by Harriet Martineau, long before there were any women ministers. Another, Catherine Cappe, proved her worth as a theologian, editing her minister husband's work after his death, writing for a variety of periodicals and anticipating some of the ideas we now associate with James Martineau. Ann Peart even thinks there is evidence that some of these women may have written sermons for their husbands.

Mainly we have tended to think of women as making their contribution by undertaking the practical tasks around the congregations. Often we have heard the report, 'There followed a delicious tea served by the ladies.' Ann insists that their church work often reached far beyond the boundaries of the kitchen and included significant fund-raising. Add the fact that women were almost always the majority in the congregation, and the claims for their enormous influence become stronger, though difficult to measure. Part of the purpose of Ann's research is to



The Rev Dr Ann Peart has researched women's contributions to ministry. Photo by John Hewerdine

bring the story of Unitarian women out of the shadowy, forgotten corners of Unitarian history.

In 2004, a celebration marking the centenary of the appointment of Gertrude von Petzold as the first woman minister of any denomination in England, was held. Her pioneering admission into training in Oxford met with considerable resistance, but since then there has been a trickle of women. Training for women at Unitarian College Manchester came in the late 1920s, cautiously, under Principal Herbert McLachlan. This may surprise some, as his reputation generally has not been that of a liberally-minded progressive. Yet he it was who complained that congregations were resistant to the idea of appointing women, even when they had been among the College's brightest students.

Among our women ministers have been some wonderful characters, including the renowned Margaret Barr, whose courageous decision to exercise a community ministry in India was met initially with no support from the decision-makers of the General Assembly, who deemed it 'not suitable work for a lone woman'. Her endeavours would have floundered had not the Women's League given their help.

Speaking alongside Ann Peart in this lecture were additional guest contributors. The Rev Anne McClelland, who has encountered pockets of resistance to the idea of women ministers, even in recent times, drew attention to the fact that Celia Midgley was only the third woman minister in 80 years to become president of the General Assembly. The Rev Joy Croft pointed out that about a third of ministers on our roll now are women. She went on to raise questions as to the image and expectations of women. 'People do expect women to be more patient, respectable and caring,' she claimed. One wonders if this is simple stereotyping.

Concluding thoughts in the lecture explored the differences that women bring. One illustration of this was in the lecture itself. The characteristic male way of doing it would be as a one-person show, a singular *tour de force*. A woman's way, not to say feminist way, would be to share the honours with a couple of her sisters in the ministry. This is what Ann did, to great affect.

This excellent lecture will be published soon in booklet form. Watch for advertisements.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.



(l-r) The Revs Jo Lane, Johanna Boeke, Ann Peart, Celia Midgley and Anne McClelland gathered to honour Gertrude von Petzold in 2004.

Letters to the Editor

GA voting is unfairly weighted

To the Editor:

The Annual General Assembly Meeting is over for another year, and decisions have been made which change our Constitution.

Unfortunately these changes were made according to a voting formula which pays scant attention to the principles of basic democracy for the wider organisation. As things now stand, the opinion of an individual paid-up member of a 'congregation' affiliated to the GA is (through Delegate representation) accredited substantially less weight than that given to any Minister, EC member or Honorary member who attends the GA meeting. I calculate that my personal vote is worth about one 20th of that of my 'Minister equivalent'.

We now have a GA Meeting which is too expensive for many of us to attend, and a decision-making system which

is heavily weighted in favour of 'the Great and the Good'. How can we expect membership to grow under such conditions?

V.C. Mason

Tideswell Derbyshire

Building Your Own

Theology - in Hereford

To the Editor:

I am taking steps to try to run BYOT courses in Hereford. My ultimate goal is to try to raise awareness of and commitment to the 'open and enquiring mind' view of faith in this locality.

I believe that the BYOT format has the potential to provide a very useful pathway towards achieving that goal.

I have never run a BYOT group experience previously, though I have known about the idea for some years.

Having taught in further education and been trained in group work as a professional social worker I believe I have important relevant knowledge and experience in trying to relate learning

goals and learning opportunities to both individual and group needs. I would greatly value accessing materials and ideas used by Unitarians who have previous experience of running a BYOT group (or groups) in recent years. I hope that I might be able to benefit from both their advice – based upon their particular course leadership experiences – plus receive copies of, or references to, any useful learning resources (e.g. handouts etc.) which have proved their value as resources in practice. Although the BYOT course booklet includes quite a few pieces of resource material, I think that I need to build up a wider range. I thank you in anticipation of any help that you may feel able to offer to me.

Arthur F. Moore

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Belmont,

Hereford,

HR2 7SJ

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E-mail: gwenandarthur@tiscali.co.uk

Community Appeal Quiz 2008 answers

Round 1: Do you remember your nursery rhymes?

1. Who is made of sugar & spice? *Little Girls*
2. Who cut off the tails of the mice? *The Farmer's Wife*
3. What did the crooked man find near a stile? *A crooked sixpence*
4. Who had no money for a pie? *Simple Simon*
5. Where was the mouse when the cat scared it? *Under the (queen's) chair*
6. Who ate bread and honey in the parlour? *The Queen*
7. When did Solomon Grundy marry? *Wednesday*
8. Who accompanied the baker and the candlestick maker? *The Butcher*
9. What did Old Mother Hubbard find in her cupboard? *Nothing*
10. Who saw Cock Robin die? *The fly*

Round 2: Identify the meeting house

1. Part of the head *Temple*
2. Mr Doolittle did not want to arrive here late *Church*
3. A Bank *Abbey*
4. A boy for a Scottish one *Kirk*
5. One accountant goes after a herb *Basilica*
6. I leave a parson *Minster*
7. That's a point to take away from a convenient place *Convent*
8. Sounds like one of two cricketing brothers *Chapel*
9. A pupil sits at the end of a Roman chair *Cathedral*
10. Unknown quantity tags on to senior monk *Priory*

Round 3: Homes of famous people

1. Which writer lived at Shandy Hall? *Laurence Sterne*
2. Which French man of letters was exiled to the Channel Islands in 1851? *Victor Hugo*
3. Which 18th century naturalist lived at Selborne? *Gilbert White*
4. Which 19th century American naturalist chose to live alone at Walden Pond? *Henry David Thoreau*
5. Which poet was born in Cockermouth in 1770? *William Wordsworth*
6. Which poet dreamed of living on Inisfree? *William Butler Yeats*
7. Whose home was for some time at Chawton? *Jane Austen*
8. Which 19th Century politician lived at Hughenden? *Benjamin Disraeli*
9. Which writer's home was Abbotsford? *Sir Walter Scott*

10. Which composer lived for 30 years at Torre del Lago? *Giacomo Puccini*

Round 4: Palindromes

1. Allude: *Refer*
2. Sister but not Sis: *Nun*
3. Sheep: *Ewe*
4. Two crotchets: *Minim*
5. Belief: *Tenet*
6. Sort of pride: *Civic*
7. Places like Ely or Chester: *Sees*
8. More embarrassed: *Redder*
9. Even: *Level*
10. Stern: *Poop*

Round 5: Plants in confusion – or solve the anagrams!

1. P. E MORRIS: *Primrose*
2. PREEN LIMP: *Pimpernel*
3. LET'S HIT: *Thistle*
4. LOAD IN DEN: *Dandelion*
5. AUNT PIE: *Petunia*
6. GRIM LOAD: *Marigold*
7. BEER HALL: *Harebell*
8. A PUN AGHAST: *Agapanthus*
9. MIST LACE: *Clematis*
10. NURSE WOLF: *Sunflower*

Round 6: Find the hymn (The 1st letter of the 1st line are given)

1. W S O: *We Shall Overcome*
2. O G O H I A P O: *God Our Help In Ages Past*
3. N T W A O G: *Now Thank We All Our God*
4. L D A L E: *Love Divine All Loves Excelling*
5. O C T I L: *O Come Together in Love*
6. M T R R W Y: *May The Road Rise With You*
7. T K O L M S I: *The King Of Love My Shepherd Is*
8. D L A F O M: *Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind*
9. H T H A S: *Hark The Herald Angels Sing*
10. I T B M: *In The Bleak Midwinter*

The winners were: 1st (£40) - Alison Parles, Luton; 2nd (£25) - Amy MacDonald, Bushey; 3rd (£15) - Alison Soulsby, Leicester

Full marks for Hatfield despite keycards

(Continued from page 8)

someone else managed to open the door with a good old-fashioned heave. The next morning it all worked perfectly. And on the Friday morning, one of the automatic doors would not open at 7am, and a man came and fixed it within five minutes. Sometimes I think that with these new-fangled gizmos like keycards and automatic doors we are asking for trouble, but that's probably just me being a crusty old f**t!

The University changed their catering arrangements (apparently we were the first group they tried it out on) so that the evening dinner was now waiter-service instead of self-service. The inevitable result was that it took twice as long, which the organisers had not bargained for, so that evening events were (at least on the first day) put back by half an hour. But the food was excellent – probably too good for my waistline!

What about the meetings themselves? Others will write detailed accounts of individual sessions. The organising team, led by Andrew Mason, just go on getting better and better. The technology made the whole affair look very professional and slick. And the President kept us (more or less) to time, without appearing to hurry or bully us – well done to Celia Midgley. The Anniversary Service made the best it could of the formal

lecture-theatre surroundings; the sound of the ethereal choir (with obbligato violin and handbells) wafting down unseen from the heavens (well, the back rows actually) was an original idea which worked well.

As usual, there were several times when the timetable scheduled two (on one occasion, three) meetings at the same time, all of which I particularly wanted to go to; but 'twas ever thus, I suppose. One could always read about it in *GA Zette* next morning. Of late I have been rather disappointed with *GA Zette*; oh, the young editors are good, and the production efficient, but it has become far too respectable! Where is the irreverence? Where are the caricatures, the caustic jokes, the critical jibes? Leave the respectability to the more measured reports that appear later in *The Inquirer*.

I liked both the main programme additions this year. The congregational vignettes showing positive experiences made welcome diversions from the business matters, and the sessions specifically on growth and renewal were a brave innovation. Whether they lead to real effective action remains to be seen; but full marks for trying. What will they try next year at Chester. I wonder? I can hardly wait!

David Arthur is a member at Wakefield.

Doris Frizel, missed by friends on Isle of Wight

Doris Frizel 1928 - 2008

Doris Frizel, who died in February aged 79, brought a wealth of experience with her when she joined our Meeting House in the Isle of Wight in 1981. She had already worked as a biochemist, teacher and researcher and had come to us following a three-year spell with the VSO, developing a clinical laboratory in a hospital in Sierra Leone.

As a child she was evacuated from London with her sister. Sadly her parents did not survive the war, but Doris worked her way through college with a scholarship. She gained an honours degree in chemistry at Hull University and later a PhD in London. This was followed by two years teaching in a college in Jamaica, a research fellowship at Leicester University, and two years research at the University of British Columbia. She had six months' leave for world travel and then a long spell as principal biochemist at Epsom District Hospital.

Doris probably first discovered Unitarianism at Leicester when she attended lectures on Comparative Religions given by the Rev Leonard Mason.

As with all her interests, Doris soon became actively involved with the Meeting House. She was our treasurer for many years and later took on the extra role of treasurer to our trustees.

In addition, Doris became our lettings officer, looking after the varied organisations who use our premises. When she died, Doris still held all these offices.

She was also still actively involved with local branches of the Carers Association, the Credit Union, Amnesty International and the Labour Party. Doris had previously worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau, as Secretary of the IW Mental Health Association and was a member of the CND. Doris was our representative on the IW Peace Council. She played an important role in the development of the Riverside Centre, a purpose-built day centre for able and disabled people on the Island.

Doris was always hands-on in her interests, never just a com-

mittee member.

Because of her experiences, world development was always important for Doris. She was co-opted, and served as a member of the Unitarian Council for World Development. She took part in marches to Make Poverty History and against the War in Iraq. This concern for the Third World was often the theme of the occasional services Doris took for us

– as was the topic of social justice in this country.

Doris was one of the regular editors of our magazine, contributing many pieces on her world travels, one being "How not to travel to Timbuktu" – the answer being – not by boat at the beginning of the dry season. Doris was a fearless traveller, usually journeying on her own and choosing not to take the tourist path.

Doris loved music, and from her early Methodist background enjoyed singing hymns. It was a great sadness to her that a throat operation a few years ago affected her singing voice.

We hold a monthly discussion group here on topics of religious and social concern which Doris often led. She had already prepared a paper for the next one on Trade Justice in the Third World

Peace and Justice were always leading concerns for Doris, but she was so unassuming you would never guess her many virtues and interests. It was a very full life. Here we miss Doris very much, but we are glad she spent so many of her years with us.

By B Jones, a member of the Newport congregation on the Isle of Wight.



Doris Frizel



(l-r) The Rev John D. Allerton, Quita Brooks, Kenneth Brooks, Joyce Ashworth, GA President. Photo by Shirley Horrocks

Ainsworth Chapel anniversary

Ainsworth Unitarian Chapel was delighted to welcome Mrs Joyce Ashworth, president of the General Assembly, and many friends from several churches, as well as from the village, to their 293rd Anniversary in April. Formal tribute was also paid to Mr Kenneth Brooks, recently retired after serving as chapel secretary for 58 devoted years. Our minister, the Rev Jeffrey Lane Gould, spoke of Kenneth's life-long connection and immeasurable service to the Chapel.

On behalf of the congregation, Joyce Ashworth presented him with an illuminated manuscript and the minister presented two garden chairs and a bouquet of flowers to Quita Brooks.

The Rev John D Allerton also paid tribute to Kenneth, recalling memories from the 34 years they worked together.

Following a delicious tea, ably prepared by the ladies of the chapel, the anniversary service was conducted by the minister, with contributions from the choir, and the address given by Mrs Joyce Ashworth. Many ladies in the congregation looked particularly elegant in stylish hats!

Bank Street Chapel hosted joint service

On Good Friday, Bank Street Unitarian Chapel members were pleased and proud to have been asked to host the Christians Together in Bolton Town Centre (CTBTC) joint service.

It was wonderful to see the chapel filled by nearly 200 people, with – apart from Unitarians – Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, United Reform Church members, Baptists, the Salvation Army and the University Chaplaincy all being represented.

The theme of the service, which was led by Bank Street's own Granville Leather, was "Togetherness"

Granville read (from David Kossow's "Book of Witnesses") the deeply moving account of Christ's journey to Golgotha as seen through the eyes of a tourist, and Nicole Rudd (the wife of the Chair of CTBTC) gave the Gospel reading. Prayers were led by Granville and also by Brian Tonge of Bank Street.

The address was by the Rev Jean Hurleston, the Bolton town centre chaplain, who reminded us that we often worship heroes or castigate villains when we know little or nothing of the people concerned – just as did the crowd baying for the crucifixion of Jesus.

After the service the congregation walked in pilgrimage to Victoria Square, where the Rev Phil Mason of Victoria Hall Methodist Church led an open air service in front of the Town Hall. To round off a wonderful morning, a local bakery provided hot cross buns for the public!

– Gordon Walker, Bank Street Chapel

Get 'On Yer Bike'

Blah Youth Programme is sponsoring an activity weekend 13-15 June for ages 7-14 called 'On Yer Bike' at Alfriston Youth Hostel, East Sussex. Arrivals at 5.30 pm on Friday, departures at 2pm on Sunday. The cost is £45, thanks to generous donations from Unitarian grant bodies and it includes all activities, accommodation and meals. If money is an issue contact John Harley. Weekend leaders are John Harley, Liz Hills and Peter Teets. Activities include mountain biking, creativity, games and circle time.

For information about the hostel and travel information see: <http://www.yha.org.uk/find-accommodation/south-east-england/hostels/alfriston/index.aspx>

For further information about the weekend please contact John Harley on 020 8670 9280 or mobile 07985 900935.

Dylan Thomas celebrated at Golders Green



Shirley and Terry King of Rosslyn Hill Chapel (right in photo), offered a programme of poems celebrating the spiritual journey of Dylan Thomas at Golders Green Unitarian Church on 23 February. Also, on the left, is George Hepburn, fellow member of Rosslyn Hill Chapel, who knew Dylan Thomas when he visited the family home in Hampstead as a young man. Photo contributed by Terry and Shirley King

Inter-Weekend coming up

Shh...It's A Secret – that's the theme of the next Inter weekend for 11-14-year-olds planned for 23-25 May at the Nightingale Centre at Great Hucklow. Youngsters will play games, get into some creative activities and all sorts of other things. Contact John Harley at Essex Hall for a booking form on 0207 240 2384 or at home on 0208 670 9280. Great Hucklow is situated just off the B6049, north of the A623, near Tideswell. The cost of the weekend is £45. Grants towards the cost of the weekend may be available from your church or district association, or contact John to see if Essex Hall can help. Booking form and personal information form should be returned as soon as possible, but not later than 15 May 2008.